



**U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement**

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# News Release

## **ICE AGENTS ARREST CONTINENTAL AIRLINES EMPLOYEES ON COCAINE SMUGGLING CHARGES**

Newark, N.J. – U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents in Newark arrested three Continental Airlines employees and a former private security guard last night on charges of conspiracy to smuggle cocaine into the United States through Newark Liberty International Airport.

ICE agents arrested Kemuel “Kenny” Hernandez, Jose Minaya, and Justriminio “David” Abreu, all baggage handlers for Continental Airlines, and Jose Lopez, a former private security guard at Newark Airport, in the operation.

All are charged with using their positions at secure areas of the airport to act as “lookouts” while others diverted cocaine-laden luggage from international to domestic baggage carousels. Through these means and by retagging suitcases containing cocaine, the conspirators sought to ensure that uniformed law enforcement personnel did not inspect the luggage.

Ultimately, the conspirators were able to divert luggage containing as much as 37 pounds of cocaine at a time. Once the luggage was delivered to the domestic carousel, it was picked up and delivered to various locations in the New York/New Jersey area.

The narcotics smuggling operation originated in the Dominican Republic, Venezuela and Mexico, where the narcotics were loaded onto commercial aircraft destined for the United States. The Newark ring operated from January 2000 to August 2003, and over that time, approximately 100 kilograms of cocaine were seized.

ICE agents in Newark conducted this investigation with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the New York-New Jersey Port Authority, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and Continental Airlines Security.

In June 2004, ICE agents arrested six Continental Airlines employees at Newark Airport in a related conspiracy. Also arrested as part of that operation were Continental employees at airports in Miami and Puerto Rico.

Thomas Manifase, Deputy Special Agent-in-Charge of the ICE office in Newark, stated that this investigation was part of an overall search for vulnerabilities in the airline travel industry, and that “employees like this pose a significant threat to our national security.”

Those arrested today face a maximum sentence of life in prison if convicted on this charge, conspiracy to traffic more than 5 kilograms of cocaine. Additional arrests are expected.

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.*